Unexpected Blue Bonnets: Surprised Valentina, Riley's Romantic Boldness, and Venezuela Truth-Bombs

Posted originally on the SquidgeWorld Archive at http://squidgeworld.org/works/72851.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Categories:	F/F, Gen
Fandom:	Inside Out 2 [2024]
Relationships:	Riley Andersen/Val Ortiz, Val Ortiz & Val Ortz's Mom
Characters:	Riley Andersen, Val Ortiz [Inside Out], Val Ortiz's Mom [Original Character]
Additional Tags:	Cross-Posted from Archive Of Our Own (AO3), Challenge Fic, Venezuela, Protests, Elections, Current Events, Politics, Historical References, Anti-Imperialism, Imperialism, U.S. Imperialism, Social Commentary, American Imperialism, 2024 US Presidential Election, 2008 US Presidential Election, Age Difference, Word count: 5.000 - 10.000, immigration, U.S. intervention in Latin America, Economic Warfare, Margarita Island, Valey, Food, Cooking, Vegetarians & Vegans, Original Character(s) - Freeform, Coming Out, Girls Kissing, Supportive Parents, princess carry, Internalized Homophobia, Implied/Referenced Homophobia, Lesbian Riley Andersen, Lesbian Character, Lesbian Val Ortiz [Inside Out], Electric Cars, Mother-Daughter Relationship, Family Bonding, Family History, Developing Relationship, LGBTQ+ Themes
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2025-03-14 Words: 6,306 Chapters: 1/1

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by lefemmerouge

Summary

One warm spring day, Val is relaxing on her bed, reading about the news, and thinking back to when she arrived in the U.S. as an immigrant from Venezuela, with her parents, almost seventeen years before. She is surprised when her adorable Minnesotan friend (or more than a friend) shows up to hang out. In the process they connect with one another, have some awkwardness, eat together, and enjoy one another's company, while their love continues to blossom like a beautiful centaurea cyanus flower.

Notes

This fic was originally posted on AO3.

I know it is canon that Valentina is Dominican-American, but this was never stated in Inside Out 2 directly (or indirectly?), only reported elsewhere. So, considering that her talented voice actress, Lilimar Hernandez (who also voiced Cleopatra in "Cleopatra in Space: by the way) is from Venezuela (she was born on Margarita Island to Cuban parents, moved to Miami at six years old, and later moved to L.A.), I wanted to go with that in this fic, instead. Additionally, considering the fact that "Inside Out" 1 and 2 are, generally, set in San Francisco, and the ice hockey camp is presumably in the same state, I'm going with Valentina as Venezuelan-American. The age gap between Val and Riley exists, but I'm did not find any information on her exact age (some say 17, others say 16), so for this story, Val is 16 and Riley is age 13, an age gap which shouldn't be an issue.

I went back and forth on this title, and even had, as an early title, "Blossoming Blue Bonnets: Valentina's Truth-Bombs About Venezuela and Riley's Boldness," among other variations. I put this together for the Spring fic challenge event since I have grown to like doing fic challenges, as it gets your fics out there. Anyway, I started this fic back in October of last year, so its good to get this out there.

The background in the beginning of this fic is important for showing what Val knows, about Venezuela from 2008 to now, and where she is coming from. I know this focus may not be everyone's cup of tea. Some may grumble with how it is explained, but it is a *vital* part of this story. I will say that I'm gonna keep writing and publishing fics about Venezuela. I am approaching Venezuela from a Western perspective. I am countering how that country, and its people, are portrayed in the corporate media in this fic. I am not covering every aspect of Venezuela here, but only what I know from self-education. Links to over 70 reliable sources, whether alternative, corporate, or other sources, are within this fic.

I hope you enjoy the fic. Thanks for reading. Comments, and constructive criticism, are welcome, but negative or hostile comments will not be published.

Update: This fic has also been posted on the Internet Archive.

See the end of the work for more notes

Maybe it was because she was watching news, or maybe it was something else, but Valentina thought back to when, all those years ago, she came to the U.S. with her parents. The year was 2008, an election year. A presidential campaign season was in full swing. There were two teams of candidates. The first was comprised of a moderate Black man and a tenured White male senator. The second comprised two White politicians. The latter was headed by a White man who represented the previous, and detested, administration, and his folksy, but brain-dead, running mate. The financial crisis had hit the country badly. Many were out of work. She and her parents could have settled in Florida, like thousands of others from Venezuela. Instead, they traveled to California to get jobs in the entertainment industry. They *felt* they would be safe there.

That same year, Hugo Chavez, architect of the Bolivarian revolution, a movement begun in the 1990s and aiming to establish political and cultural hegemony in Venezuela, so the country could decide its own destiny, dared the U.S. to put the country on the state-sponsors of terrorism list. He declared they were in a "battle against North American imperialism." Later that year, international tensions were so high that Chavez expelled the U.S. ambassador from the country, in an act of solidarity with Bolivia. The latter accused the U.S. of fomenting violent protests in their country. Venezuela also withdrew their ambassador from Washington, D.C., at the same time.

Due to everything happening then, it was no surprise that Valentina's parents saw their situation in Venezuela as perilous. They had been working for the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). She vaguely remembered that they told her that they had fled Venezuela because they were helping bring "democracy" to the country. Some years later, she learned that this organization, which influenced countries like the CIA had done years prior, was *not* about democracy at all. In fact, it supported an unsuccessful coup in 2002, tried to manipulate electoral outcomes, and helped undermine the duly-elected Venezuelan government. Whether one fully agreed with the Venezuelan government or not, U.S. intervention made it impossible for Venezuelans to *truly* determine their own political future. She found that disturbing.

All these years later, another presidential election had taken the country's attention. A Black woman who vowed to continue the policies of an aging White man, and a fascist in a suit, faced off against one another. However, Venezuela was not on the minds of many. Instead, they were focused on economic strains, climate change, and "problems" caused by migrants. The latter was an avenue for them to project their racial fears. The news noted that Nicholas Maduro, the individual elected following

Chavez's death in March 2013, remained in power, despite efforts by the CIA and others to overthrow him. Typically, the CIA denied the claims.

Some called for *more* sanctions, despite the fact that they would hurt ordinary Venezuelans more than anyone else. The latter were admitted to have exacerbated a humanitarian crisis in the country. All the while, the sitting U.S. government grumbled about "repression," claimed election tampering, and openly welcomed Venezuelan opposition, which had reportedly lost steam when Western-educated opposition leader Edmundo González Urrutia fled the country. The U.S. government *abhorred* the duly-elected social democratic government. González Urrutia had wanted a "democratic transition," whatever that meant. He had replaced a U.S.-backed far-right opposition leader named María Corina Machado. The U.S. wanted a more friendly government, one which would allow U.S. companies to swoop in, without restriction, and exploit the country's so-called "natural resources." They wanted to siphon *more* of the country's resources away to benefit money-grubbing wealthy Americans, instead of Venezuelans.

Valentina knew all of this. She read about it, on her own, for years and years. Educating yourself on what is happening in the world isn't always easy. Everything was a bit of a haze, since not many people have very early memories. However one stuck in her mind: her parents cheering when it was announced that the aforementioned Black man, Barack Obama, who could *also* be described as multiracial, since he had a Black father and White mother, had won the presidency. Before that point, Chavez had declared that Obama, and the man he was running against, were defending "the interests of empire." Undoubtedly, Chavez was annoyed after the U.S. accused Venezuela of supporting a Colombian paramilitary group known as FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), but remained open to being Obama's friend.

That didn't pan out. The U.S. would, during Obama's time in office, impose sanctions on Venezuelans *reportedly* engaged in "human rights abuses," and sanctioned others under an even broader executive order. With the victory of the orange menace in 2016, against an outwardly militarist and corporatist candidate, who called his supporters "deplorables," U.S. policy got tougher, with more sanctions and proposed U.S. military intervention. His administration even backed an unsuccessful coup! Unsurprisingly, Venezuela broke diplomatic ties with the U.S., in January 2019, after the U.S.-backed right-wing Juan Guaidó was wrongly claimed as the winner.

This continued into the administration led by *another* old White man. There were attempts to offset loss of Russian oil imports with Venezuelan petroleum exports and sanction relief, and then re-imposition of sanctions after that country's presidential election in July 2024, absurdly claiming fraud. While the election season was going on, Valentina had

thought, to herself, that neither of the major party candidates would truly do *anything* to benefit Venezuelans and their appetite for *real* democracy. Instead, they wanted democracy which benefited the imperial core, even if more people were exploited along the way. That was more the case now since that the orange menace had reigned victorious. The latter made her sick to her stomach. Sanctions had been tightened, even resulting in the Venezuelan government selling off a state oil firm, an appeal for foreign investment, and refusal to accept any more deportation flights.

All of this might have seemed a heavy topic for a girl who headed a varsity hockey team and proudly had a red streak in her hair. Her confident style, plus her dedication to be kind and supportive of others, had garnered her fans on the team, and within her high school. As a result, many saw her as a role model. She didn't care about the latter. In fact, she was very humble, even as a leader. She never, ever wanted to be the *mean girl*. She never bullied anyone, or thought of doing anything like that. In fact, she could be nervous, weird, or quirky, just like anyone else.

She could lift up those who were star-struck, or intimidated, by her. This included a girl who was three years younger than her, a girl from rural Minnesota, named Riley Andersen. While that girl remained happy to her core, her new emotions had thrown her for a loop, even causing her to have a panic attack. Val helped her through that, remaining empathetic. The other girls at the hockey camp helped too. At that very moment, she sprawled across her bed and was texting back and forth with Riley. They had become friends, or perhaps something more, after her episode at the camp. She had forgiven her for what she had done before. She'd even gotten used to Riley's friends, who she could admit were *a bit weird* sometimes.

While sitting at home, in her room, sitting across her bedspread, she wasn't wearing any makeup, like her trademark red eye-shadow. She didn't have on her golden necklace emblazoned with her name, which her mom had given her some years ago, nor golden piercings. She had a much more relaxed look. She wore a classic royal-blue sweater across one shoulder over-top a black bra. She also had on black sweatpants and red short socks, completing her look. Her brown eyes stared at her phone screen. She was curious. Riley had stopped typing. She scratched her head and twirled her brown hair with her fingers. *What was Riley doing?*

Just then she heard the doorbell ring. Her mom had gone to some event with other Venezuelan émigrés. She was there *alone*. The flowers were blooming outside. It was so much brighter than the previous months, with many days that had been gray and overcast from the rain and other precipitation. She was glad that winter was *finally* over. Spring was perhaps her favorite season, apart from fall. Even though she was a ice

hockey player, it turned out she wasn't a big fan of the cold *outside* the hockey field. While she liked warm weather in the summer, she also disliked being sunburned, and the sweltering heat.

She quickly ran down to the door and grabbed the handle. In one sweeping motion, she swung it open. As the warm spring air rushed inside, she saw the girl she didn't expect: Riley. What in the world was she doing there? And *why*? She had been *completely* caught off guard. Now would *definitely* not be the time to admit that she didn't like winter. It might confuse the girl more, considering their shared love of ice hockey.

"Hey, Val. I thought we could hang out…since it's a Saturday and all."

Staring at Riley's cornflower blue-eyes, Val *knew* she couldn't say no. It wouldn't be right. She hadn't planned for this visit, but she was okay with letting her in. What would be the harm?

"Sure, sure, you can come in…I wasn't doing *anything*…just reading some news."

After Val closed the door behind her, Riley began to walk into the living room. Val pointed up the stairs. "Come on, let's go to my room. It's *more comfortable* there, anyway."

This made Riley very nervous. She had never been to Val's room in all the time they had been friends. What if something happened there? What if she broke something? What if…

Her thoughts were completely cut off when Val tightly grabbed her hand. "Come on, Riley. *Let's go*." For one reason or another, Riley was completely mesmerized. She began to blush. Perhaps it was Val's nonchalant, kind, and mature nature. It wasn't her sense of humor, at least not *this time*. Ever since she had met her, she had admired Val. Now, she saw her as less of a star, less of an inspirational person. She saw her as a *real* person, someone who was a cool older girl and go-getter who could give her guidance. In Japanese culture, the term "Val-chan" might have been used, but in U.S. culture, that honorific wasn't used.

After entering Val's room, Riley could tell that it was tidy and clean, as she expected. Even the bed looked neatly made, apart from some rumples caused by her laying across it. After Riley came in, Val slightly closed the door. She started speaking, without warning. "So, I was thinking about my roots recently...and my home country…"

Riley wasn't sure how to respond. She knew enough that she had awareness that asking someone about where they were from *could* be tricky. You didn't want to ask in such a way that demonized and hurt

someone. At the same time, you couldn't let your curiousness about someone undermine inclusiveness. Rather, you could talk with that person as a friend and a colleague, instead of as an outsider.

"Oh okay, tell me *more* about that."

Val took a deep breath. Maybe this was *too much* for Riley to take in, but she decided to tell her about it anyway. She felt a connection with Riley in one way or another. Why not reveal a bit more about herself?

"Well, I was born on Margarita Island. It's only 390-square-miles across. Now it's racked by organized crime thanks to a crisis engineered, in large part, by this...country."

Before Riley could take in Val's last statement, which confused her, she wanted to step back a bit. *Where* was this island? *What* country was it in? She wasn't always great with geography, but she'd never heard of a place with that name. She tried to ask about it the *best way* without causing any offense. The *last thing* she would want was to annoy Val.

"So...uh...where is Margarita Island?"

Val laughed. She forgot that not many people knew where an island like that was. Not everyone could name all the islands and islets near the mainland, but *she could*. She had learned them all on her own. Perhaps the Geobee had been worth it after all, where she had been booted from the national contest by getting a question wrong about Qatar of all places.

"It's off the coast of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. I mean...Venezuela, you know."

Oh, *that* country. She knew about it tangentially, not from the private "debate party" with her parents, in which one vice presidential candidate had called for mass deportation of undocumented immigrants, and claimed they were hurting those who "deserve to be here," but from the presidential debate the prior year. At that debate, the fascist in a suit had absurdly declared that the U.S. allowed millions of criminals, terrorists, and others into the U.S. from Venezuela and elsewhere. He red-baited by claiming his opponent would turn the country into "Venezuela on steroids." Otherwise, her knowledge was limited, apart from nightly news casts, which occasionally mentioned the country.

She put all of that lack of knowledge aside. The *worst thing* she wanted was to embarrass herself in front of someone like Val. She decided to lighten the mood, or attempted to. She accidentally blurted something out by accident, without thinking about it much. *Oops*.

"Oh, I *thought* you were from the Dominican Republic...someone told me…"

Val cut her off. *Why* did she think that? *Who* had told her that false information? She didn't want to get angry at her or anything, but that was a *pretty big error,* at least in her book. She had to correct Riley on this. She had no choice. She couldn't let this slide. Clearly still annoyed, she began her retort.

"Whoever told you that is *full of crap*...I need to give *that person* a talking to."

She could tell Val was getting angry. Her struggles were beginning to bubble to the surface. Riley wasn't always the best with this. Even so, she thought she'd try to bring down the negative energy.

"Val, don't worry about it...I mean, *you* thought I was from Michigan when we first met…"

She realized that her dirty-blonde-haired friend was right. It wasn't *anything* to fret over, especially since she didn't know *who* had given Riley the wrong information. But now that she knew the truth… she wouldn't make that mistake *again*, so she was glad about that, at least. She chuckled a little.

"Thanks, Riley. *Sometimes* I just don't feel like I'm doing enough...I'm *not* always as put together as you think...it takes a *lot* of effort to remain cool."

She understood that. She firmly held Val's hand. "It will be okay. If there's anything you need...I'll try to help." Val was a bit taken aback. She hadn't expected Riley to be that forceful. It was *fine*. Isn't this the type of thing *friends* did? Or at least that's what she would tell her mom. Riley came in a little closer and sat next to her. She spoke so softly that only Val could hear what she said next.

"I wanna know *more* about why you think this country engineered the crisis in Venezuela...that's not what people say on social media or the nighttime TV broadcasts...I know so little and someone as smart, *beautiful*, and laid-back as you, maybe *you* can...help me out."

Val blushed a little. Her olive skin began to get warm. Did Riley *really* call her beautiful and smart *in one sentence*? She hadn't expected that. Maybe she was being bolder.

Taking a deep breath, she realized she wanted to learn *more* about Riley too. She had felt something for her from the moment they met. She wanted to help her out, share her knowledge with her. She wanted them to share something more. She guessed that her Minnesotan friend felt

similarly, but she couldn't know for sure unless she asked her. Suddenly she started getting a little nervous.

"Is it getting hot in here...or is it *just me*? Let's go down to the kitchen and get something eat...we can talk there instead of here…it will be more comfortable down there, you know."

Riley hadn't expected that. Her emotions were going wild. She didn't know how to respond. Should she be glad? What *should* she be feeling? Sure, she had watched a host of animated series where characters said the same thing, often Japanese series which focused on intimate friendships or romances between girls. She secretly liked them a lot. She'd be *way* too embarrassed to tell Val about it. She didn't say anything else and followed behind Val. They made their way down to the kitchen.

Riley sat on one side of the counter, which had a shiny granite top. Val went on the other side. Some people liked these surfaces because they were easy to clean, but this didn't prevent them from chipping. To make matters worse, there were tiles on the floor, with grooves between them, which looked nice. However, it was *a pain* if they ever got dirty or the tile had to be cleaned.

The kitchen had once been a garage. The house's former occupants had turned it into a kitchen. One of them, who worked as some ~~pencil-pusher~~ bureaucrat within the Internal Revenue Service once boasted that he was a socialist. He declared that one way to make change was from "the inside." Val's parents weren't sure what to make of this, since they had been influenced by anti-socialist propaganda spread by the country's opposition forces, which were backed by the U.S. and other Western countries. All those countries wanted do was to ravage the country and exploit it to the fullest. They *didn't care* about the people who lived there, not at all. They claimed "democracy" was their goal, but that was an utter lie. They could care less about democracy.

It took a while for Val to unlearn all this reactionary stuff. Even so, she still *never* openly shared her views about Venezuela in the frequent family gatherings. She usually just nodded along or acted like she agreed. She was afraid what they might say, what they might accuse her of, even though the fact she had a different opinion was not a bad thing. There's no rule saying children *must* have the same views as their parents. If there ever was such a rule, it would certainly be violated over and over again.

Val opened the stainless steel fridge and saw what was inside. She had learned over the years how to make Venezuelan food. She knew some of the typical "common" foods eaten by teens, whether spaghetti, pizza, or stuff like that. But, they weren't her favorite things to eat, not at all. Surely not all Venezuelan émigrés eat the foods of their home country,

but some do. Val's family was the latter. They enjoyed vegetables and many tropical fruits, with food reflecting the country's rich history, including flavors from Africa, Spain, and even Italy. This included a disk made of corn-dough which could be fried or baked, and filled with grated cheese, or some other food. It was called an *arepa*. How it was cooked had changed over time.

She had many choices for what she could make. She could cook pancakes from ground (and grated) corn, on a flat griddle, slathering it with margarine and soft white cheese. These were known as *cachapas* and were a staple of street food. There was also a wide variety of fish eaten, whether red snappers, groupers, trout, or kingfish, often with rice, fried plantains, and a salad consisting of grilled tomatoes and carrots. Some food was barbecued. Many soups were consumed, including hearty pumpkin (*auyama*) or lentil (*lenteja*) soup, or a mix of vegetables, fruits, and meat, named *sancocho*.

There were regional specialties too, but the country's national dish was the *pabellon criollo*, which came in different forms. People in Venezuela liked eating avocados, black beans, and various meat dishes. These were accompanied by a number of drinks using exotic fruits, filtered water, or even alcohol (for those who were old enough). Of course, there were also fried corn-dough turnovers, commonly called *empanadas*, bakery snacks like *pastelitos*, *cachitos*, *golfeados*, or many deserts. Many Venezuelans had a sweet tooth. Val did as well.

Staring inside the fridge, she saw ingredients for most of these dishes. Even so, she knew that pastelitos, cachitos, and golfeados would take too long, or included animal products. She had become a strict vegetarian and refused to deviate from that. That was one thing she did *not* mind bringing up in family gatherings. She knew food was an important part of her family get-togethers. She decided to make cachapas. She pulled out a frying pan from the cupboard, then vegetable oil, which she had put into a spray bottle (she convinced her parents to do this) and began cooking.

Riley was amazed. She *didn't know* that Val knew how to cook, at least not like this. She just saw her as a cool, yet kind and empathetic girl, who could be laid-back and childlike at times, while sporting an iconic red stripe in her hair. She could also be *very* trendy like others her age. Val started by mixing the egg, corn kernels, flour, and sugar together in a blender, from an old machine her grandma had given them, for about third seconds, and then transferred the mix to a bowl. At the same time, she prepared the frying pan.

She proceeded to brush the pan with the vegetable oil, place the batter onto the pan, swirl it around, and cook each of these pancakes, as they could be called, one by one. She cooked them long enough until their bottom sides were golden brown, then did the same on the top side. She

had a plate ready to go. She topped the cachapas with shredded mozzarella, which she had prepared while cooking the other parts of the dish. She artfully folded these cakes-of-sorts in half, like a taco, and slid one over to Riley. She finished cooking more of them, as she used up the rest of the batter. Although some people liked serving cakes with hot sauce, she did not. She already had *enough* hotness in her life. She didn't have to go wild with her food *too*.

Riley wanted to wait until Val sat down before she started, but Val insisted that she begin eating. Her stomach grumbled. Her face turned as bright as a grilled tomato. Unable to stop herself, she decided to chow down. All the tastes came together, whether the flour, the corn, the egg, the sugar, or the cheese. She loved nothing more than *good cheese*. Perhaps it was because she had some Italian roots. Her great-grandparents had immigrated from northern Italy, in the Emilia-Romagna region, to be exact, before the beginning of the first world war. Some family members had speculated that her great-grandfather had been trying to flee the draft, but no one knew for sure. By the time she began researching into it, he wasn't alive anymore, and her dad knew as much as she did, which was… *very little*.

"Val, this is...*amazing*! I didn't know you could make such good food...maybe I should have you as *my wife*, so you can make so many wonderful meals for the rest of my life."

After she said that, she realized she had made a mistake. Had she just, *sort of* proposed to Val. OOPS! She didn't mean to say that, but it just came out. Val began blushing and tried to laugh it off.

"Yeah, I'm getting better at cooking, but I need to figure out how to *make it vegan* next time...without using an egg...I could be *your wife* too, if you want to...you know...down the line."

Riley was dumbstruck. Val had said they were going to get married someday? Right? She was so excited. Even so, she didn't know what to say next. *How* do you navigate this situation? What do you say next? She was still figuring out. But, perhaps she and Val could figure it out *together*.

The awkwardness faded as they continued chattering away. Val's comment dissipated into nothingness. Neither one wanted to move too fast. They weren't throwing some impromptu party on the beach, singing a song, and asking the other one to marry them. That would be that foolish. Nor would they get advice about something like this from any hopeless romantics. Instead, they would go at their own pace. If they decided they would marry, it would be their decision. In any case, they would stay together and try to learn more about each other, first.

Val brought the subject back to politics and… Venezuela. It was one of the things she cared deeply about and followed every day. She even had a news alert set up for it, even though she was wary about talking with fellow Venezuelan-Americans about it since they could be reactionary on the subject.

"Riley, you said you wanted to know more about Venezuela. Well, now is a perfect time since *this* country is labeling some right-wing opposition leader as the rightful president, rather than the elected one. It's so frustrating. Can't this country *actually* respect democracy for once? Gah!"

Riley was unsure what to say to her. She had seen some headlines, either about possible U.S. legal cooperation with Venezuela, or efforts to stabilize the country's oil industry. But she had never read the articles fully. That was something she needed to do. Sometimes it was far to easy to read bit-sized news, but *actual* analysis. Social media encouraged the former.

"Isn't Maduro a…*bad guy*?" Riley began, and then hedged her comment. "Hasn't his government committed all sorts of human rights violations?…I mean, that's what they *always* say, right?"

Val knew that the corporate media was against Venezuela in more ways than one, whether supporting regime change, or possible military intervention, through their coverage, while the U.S. backed client states like Paraguay to undermine Venezuela. She began laughing and shook her head. She was prepared to tell Riley what was really going on, at least from what she knew.

"Maduro isn't the best, I grant you, but he was *elected*. That's more than you can say about this country, where a billionaire is ravaging public institutions and tearing apart the civil service without any regard for anyone, except himself, all in a *supposed* effort to save money. It's utterly disgusting. The government in Venezuela is aligned with peace, sovereignty, and Palestine. Social movements and others are interlinked with what is called the Bolivarian Revolution and continually push the government to do more to hold back the wealthy and do *more* to help the populace. It's a continual struggle."

Riley wasn't sure what to say. She knew that if her parents were there, they'd probably harp on why Venezuela should be sanctioned to death, parroting what they heard from the nightly news, even if they didn't *directly* support killing Maduro. They weren't those kind of people. They cared about human rights, but also supported *imposing* the "right" values on certain people. She had started to grow uncomfortable with the latter, as she learned more about the U.S.'s bloody history through her own reading.

Before Riley could say anything more, Val added, "I can *show you* what are some good sources. I like reading *Dissident Voice*, *Venezuela Analysis*, and some others. You need to know how to read the news carefully, whether corporate media or the ones which call themselves 'alternative,' you know."

Riley was overjoyed. Why not learn more about the country *your really good friend* was from? It was far too easy to get stuck inside her bubble and not care that much about the world around you, or create a bubble where you *do* care about things, but only what affects you as a *White person*. She didn't want that. She wanted to break out of that mindset. Val could help her do that.

"Thanks so much, Val...I'd be happy to learn from you...since *you are the expert*, after all," Riley said, sheepishly, and almost jokingly. She had heard about the DHS terminating the temporary, and protected, status, of thousands of Venezuelans, placing them in a terrible limbo, and putting them all at risk for deportation. The latter had the possibility to destabilize Venezuela, benefiting those which wanted to turn into a capitalist paradise. With everything that was happening, it was far too easy to be pulled into the news deluge. You could easily be overwhelmed.

If you followed the news, you might know about the U.S. seizure of a Venezuelan presidential plane, sitting in the Dominican Republic, new U.S. designation of Venezuela as a new part of a "axis of evil" with Cuba and Nicaragua. You might even catch the meeting between U.S. and Venezuelan envoys about migration, releasing U.S. nationals, and other topics, with hopes of improved relations.

Corporate media outlets, in the U.S., would undoubtedly obscure the country's plan to hold legislative and regional elections on April 27th, or the presentation, by Maduro, of a package of constitutional reforms, said to expand participatory democracy and establish "a long-term economic roadmap" for Venezuela. Whether one agreed with those actions, or not, the fact was that U.S. media was overtly hostile toward Venezuela, making it hard to know what was *really* going on.

There probably wouldn't be articles noting how Venezuela lost CITGO, part of the country's state oil company. Some said this happened due to U.S. aggression coupled with incompetence and collusion by the country's right-wing opposition, causing the country to lose *tens of billions* of dollars. Venezuelan migrants were *originally* sent, by the U.S., to the notorious Guantanamo prison, then those same migrants arrived in Venezuela where they were received in a dignified manner.

Despite Riley's claims, Val was *no expert*. Sure, she followed the news closely, and read alternative publications, but she hadn't made it her life's work. She only wanted to know what was going on in her birth

country. She didn't plan to go back any time soon, but she liked to be connected to her roots.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw a nearby flower. Oh no, her mom didn't do *that* did she? Uh oh. She tried to stop Riley's gaze and attempted to draw her attention away. "Let's go upstairs and talk a little more...it will be more *comfortable* there," she said, while putting her plate in the sink. She didn't even attempt to wash it off, not this time. All this was for naught.

She saw it. The majestic colors of the blooming hurtsickles outside caught her eye. "Let's go outside and check out those goggleblusters...they look beautiful!" Val put her head in her hands. She couldn't be more embarrassed. How could her mom do this do her? *Why* did her mom do this to her? Did she know that she liked Riley or something? That couldn't be good. She still hadn't come out to them as a lesbian, yet. She wasn't sure how and was afraid they would reject her.

Riley pulled Val outside, opening the door with a fast motion, and made her way to the front garden. There the flowers were, blooming right in front of her. "Were you trying to hide this from me, Val? Who wouldn't want to see flowers like that? I mean their petals make ice cream look *amazing.*"

Val sighed. She had to tell her, even though she would sort of be admitting she liked Riley... "They look like your eyes, Riley...Uh… so… I was joking with my mom and she must have taken me seriously and planted them...isn't it *weird* to plant blue bonnets which have the same color as your eyes?...I mean…"

Riley shook her head. She didn't find it weird at all. She tried to tamp down Val's fears. "Don't worry about that...it shows you *care* so much about me...I'd do the same for you...but I don't know of any brown-colored flowers...except decaying ones...and that's *too* depressing!"

Val let out a hearty laugh. They started chattering about how each of them called the flowers by a different name, whether a blue bonnet or a googlebuster, and noted all the other names a bluecap, cornbottle, boutonierre flower, bachelor's buton, or hurtsickle. "But my favorite name of the flower, Riley," Val began, is "cornflower, because it reminds me of *you*."

As they sat together and enjoyed each other's company, Riley took the initiative. It seemed like the right time. She asked a big question. "Uh, Val, can I kiss you?"

Val was surprised. Was Riley really asking this? Did she really want this? Val nodded. Her dreams were *finally* coming true.

She brought her face closer to Val. Before they knew it, their lips were touching. They kissed in front of the cornflowers, and their hair touched one another. They couldn't be happier together. Apparently now they were *girlfriends*, although that hadn't been the original plan...

Just then, her mom pulled up in her suave electric car, a pinkish-red Audi e-tron GT. Val quickly got out of Riley's loving embrace and approached her mom, who was parking her car. Riley was still in a bit of a daze over everything. She couldn't believe she had kissed Val. Were they romantic partners now? I guess? She was still trying to to figure it out. As Val's mom stepped out of her car, Val attempted to explain herself.

"Mom, you're back early...Riley came over to hang out...and well...we just did things that friends do, *you know*...that's how it is..."

Val said this uneasily. She didn't want to lie to her mom, but she felt she had no choice. What if her mom got angry? What if she threw her out? What would she do then? She didn't like this.

Her mom chuckled. "Oh, my sweet Valentina...I *know* you are gay...you don't need..."

This horrified Val. How did her mom figure it out? What was she going to do to her? She stuttered as she attempted to reply. This wasn't how it was supposed to go! She wanted to come out on her own terms. That's how it should be, right? She decided to be honest.

"I...wanted to tell you mom...but I was so afraid of what you might do...or say...I..."

Her mom walked forward and hugged her. She began to cry a little, with tears streaming down her face. Her own daughter was afraid of her? That made her more sad than anything else she had heard that day. The fact that she couldn't tell her this, did *not* make her feel good. Why did she think this? She had to clear the air once and for all. She had to avoid this crisis.

"Sweetie...you are my pride and joy, my *mija*. I'll love you no matter what. It's your business who you love...I don't dictate that for you...just know that I have your back."

Val began crying. She couldn't be happier to hear this. It always great to have a supportive parent. At least part of this coming out was unfolding as she imagined. Riley wasn't sure what to do. She didn't want to walk away, but she also didn't want to ruin their moment either... that wouldn't be right.

As she remained indecisive, Val's strong arm grabbed hers. She suddenly found herself in a princess carry. *Why* was this happening? And so fast! It

was a *lot* for her to process. "Val!," she said, with a sense of desperation as her face turned red once more, "you don't have to do this. I can walk on my own."

She shook her head. That's not how this would go down. She wanted to be proud of who she was, even as Riley's face became redder than a full glass of red wine.

"Mom, I'd like you to meet my *girlfriend*, Riley Andersen." Her mom nodded. She had seen Riley around and remembered her daughter blabbing about her after she returned from hockey camp. That was the moment she *knew* that her precious mija was gay. She was more supportive because some other mothers she talked to were going through the same thing at that time and she had read a bit about it.

Val finally released Riley from the princess carry, placing her feet onto the ground. They all hugged one another and headed inside. Her mom then jokingly declared, "Val planted them for *you*, Riley, she told me so." Val gave a disapproving look. She wasn't supposed to say *that*! Her mom kept throwing her off with stuff like this. UGH! "MOM! *That was a secret!*"

Riley began laughing. They all went inside the house and closed the door. They all planned to have a fun time. Her dad wasn't there. He was away for business, like always, managing a company which helped Venezuelan-Americans settle in the U.S. What remained, for all of them, was something they would have to figure out together...

End Notes

For this fic I relied upon sources noted on the "Venezuelan Americans" and "Venezuelan cuisine" Wikipedia pages and information from the official page on the film on Pixar's website, an interview with Lilimar, a CBR character guide on Inside Out 2 characters, Inside Out 2 production notes, and other assorted articles, like the Disney, Heroes and Villains, and Inside Out wiki fandom pages for her. In fact, I only found one fic which notes her as Dominican and references it in the text: Rosette C's well-done, and put together, fic, entitled "Oak Lane." There are very few fics on here about the current events in Venezuela, as far as I can tell. In fact, there's only one I could find, entitled "Libertadores (Liberators)" by FoxyAtlas, begins relatively negatively, calling Nicolas Maduro a swindler (basically) and implying the same for Hugo Chavez, and saying the former was corrupt, That view, which doesn't have much nuance, clearly aligns with a Western/U.S. perspective, and seems to say the protesters are completely justified, without noting the role of Western countries. That fic also describes Maduro as a "dictator." This fic goes a different route.

I also drew from pages 233-243, 247-255 of Russell Maddicks' book, "The Essential Guide to Customs & Culture: Venezuela," which I read on Hoopla, to get a better understanding of what Venezuelans eat. I linked to actual recipes if you ever want to make this food! I learned that this ship is called Valey (or Rival, Valley, Ortizen, and Ortisen) from the page on it, on the shipping fandom site, which said "before the movie came out, some fans believed that Val and Riley would become a canon couple or that Riley would have a confirmed crush on her due to some of the clips shown in the trailers. While this didn't become a reality, it didn't stop fans from still liking the idea. Many fans think of Valey as an unrequited crush on Riley's part, possibly with Val being her gay awakening as well. Given the age gap between the two characters, some prefer this interpretation rather than a future romantic relationship." Furthermore, the fic "con tanto amor" was used as an inspiration for the food section of this fic.

Notably, in a sort-of recent article, co-writer of "Inside Out 2", Dave Holstein, stated, in terms of Val and Riley in the film, "I think that the discussion throughout the entire film is just to give her someone to look up to, the way a freshman looks up to a senior. I mean, [it's a] girl crush in that way, but it's like there's someone who… I always had this in school too, where you see someone who seems way older. They're probably 18 months older, but they just found a confidence in themselves that speaks to where people want to be at that age in life. Frankly, it's not even age, it's confidence, and we wanted to give her that character to then give her anxiety, to then give us a movie."

Technically, "Val Ortiz's Mom" is an original character since she does not appear in the original film. Other parts of this fic are loosely based on my personal experience of certain events in my life and what I've heard. For instance, the set-up of the kitchen resembles the kitchen in my childhood home.

Works inspired by this one

Unexpected Blue Bonnets: Valentina's Determination, Riley's Romantic Boldness, and Venezuela Truth-Bombs [Updated Version] by lefemmerouge

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